



Bird Wildlife of Aruba

ARUBA BIRDLIFE CONSERVATION





Aruba Birdlife Conservation

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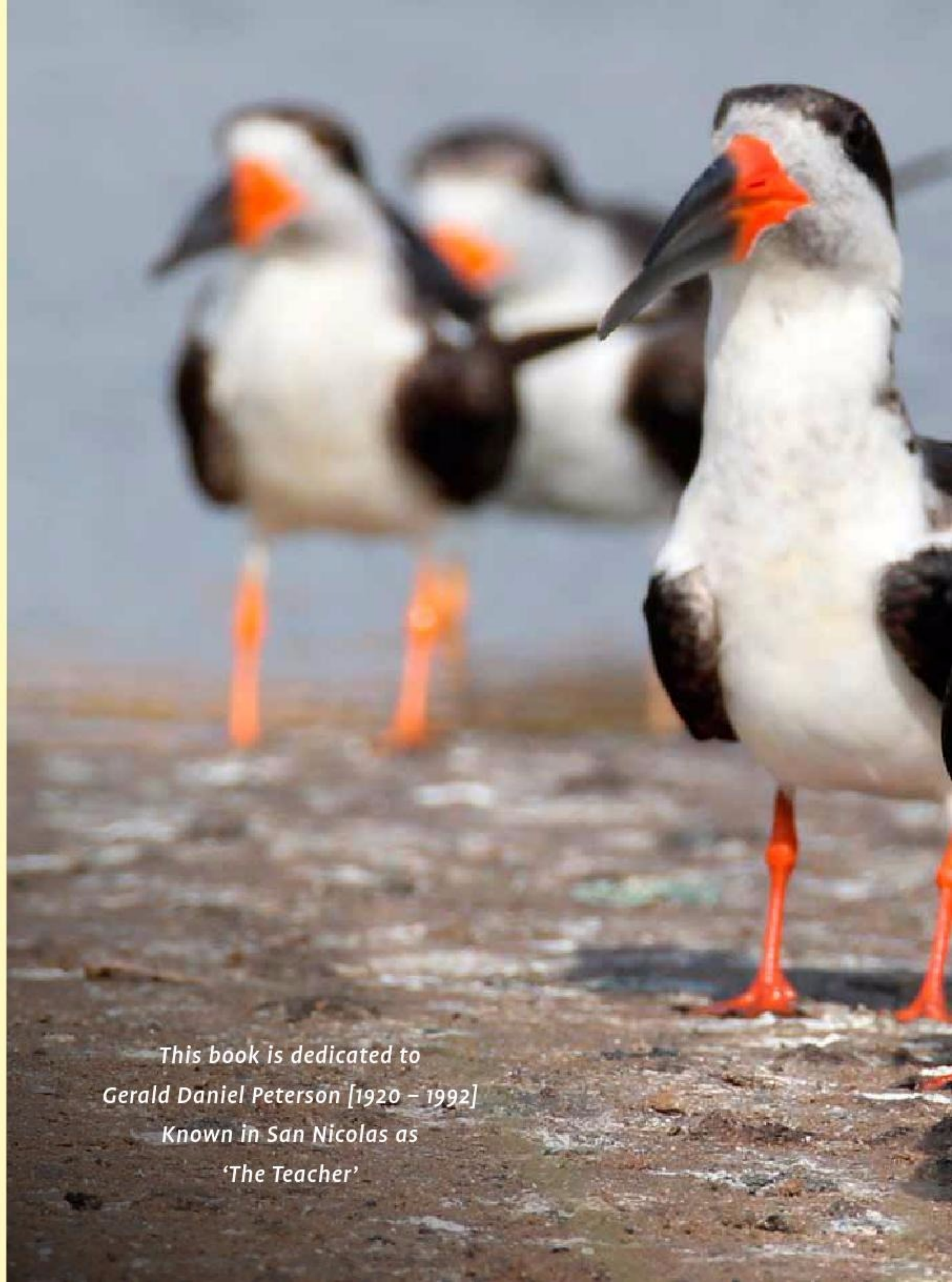
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*This book is dedicated to
Gerald Daniel Peterson [1920 – 1992]
Known in San Nicolas as
'The Teacher'*





“It is easy to understand why so many of us are so fond of birds. They are lively; they are lovely; and they are everywhere. They have characters with which we can easily identify – cheeky and shy, gentle and vicious, faithful – and faithless. Many enact the dramas of their lives in full view for all to see. They are part of our world yet, at a clap of our hands, they lift into the air and vanish into their own with a facility that we can only envy. And they are an ever-present link with the natural world that lies beyond our brick walls. It is hardly surprising that human beings have studied birds with a greater dedication and intensity than they have lavished on any other group of animal.”

David Attenborough

The Life of Birds. BBC

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Foreword

By Adrian Delnevo, Ph.D.

Many people are rightly concerned about the state of the world's natural resources. It would be true to say that never before has there been such widespread awareness of the environment and its diverse habitats and the species that inhabit them. To a very great extent this global awareness has been possible through the publication of many books, wildlife films, documentaries, and photographs. This book beautifully contributes to the education and awareness of Aruba's glorious wildlife, and in particular it's resident and migratory birds.

Of course there have been other books on Aruba's birds, and some of these include attractive photographs. But never before has such a comprehensive photographic guide to Aruba's birdlife been compiled. A total of 129 species, all photographed on Aruba, has been carefully and unobtrusively photographed and lovingly assembled.

Aruba sits in the southern Caribbean and thus combines its 'local' bird population, with other Caribbean bird species, migrants from South and Central America, and migrants from North America. Aruba sits on an important migratory crossroads, and yet relatively little is known about the status and conservation of its bird species. Within the last few years great advances in the identification of important habitats and sites for birds on Aruba have been made. The Bubali wetlands is an important nesting and resting place for multiple species of waterbirds. Its surrounding vegetation attracts a broad range of non-waterbird species. The unique Bubali habitat and three other locations were proclaimed Important Bird Area (IBA) by BirdLife International in 2008. Indeed, one of these IBA's, the San Nicholas Bay Reef Islands, is one of the most important locations for nesting terns in the world. The Spanish Lagoon is a RAMSAR site another form of internationally recognized site. The mangroves and other vegetation surrounding the Spanish Lagoon is an important resting spot for migratory birds. But with an increasing knowledge of the ecological needs of the birds and other wildlife, and an expanding human population, it has become clear that more areas are needed to maintain sustainable wildlife. For this reason, Aruba Birdlife Conservation with assistance of experts, has identified an additional sixteen (16) sites as well as a marine park that need conservation and legally-binding protection. Next to a marine

Dr. Adrian Delnevo grew up in rural Oxfordshire, England where as a very young boy he was fortunate to have England's first Ph.D. in ornithology (Dr. Bruce Campbell), as a birding, and bird banding tutor. Adrian went on to become director of two British Bird Observatories, where he spent the late 1970's/early 1980's conducting bird research, population studies, biodiversity ecology, and banding many thousands of birds. He gained his Ph.D. in avian ecology in 1990. Adrian later became a research biologist for the world's largest ornithology conservation organization (RSPB) and guided seabird and other bird research throughout Europe, Africa and the Caribbean. He first studied birds and biodiversity in the Caribbean in 1984, and started his first project on Aruba in 1997. He has been coming back ever since. His post-doctoral studies included being the European coordinator for the threatened roseate tern, and thus it was natural that his first studies on Aruba involved the globally unique tern colonies within San Nicolas Bay. These studies, involving ten species of nesting terns have contributed to several internationally recognized sites on Aruba being proclaimed an Important Bird Area (IBA). He also has been monitoring land-birds on Aruba since 2002, and in particular how land-bird populations and their habitats have changed over time. Adrian has led many training courses, including bird identification, census studies, statistics, and biodiversity and ecology for the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (DCNA), for whom he is an informal science advisor. Adrian continues to conduct research and monitoring throughout the Caribbean, and particularly within the Dutch islands. For the last twenty two years, Adrian has provided scientific support to legal counsel regarding alleged injury to natural resources and biodiversity, and is an adjunct professor at two US universities.

park, the sixteen proposed sites, which include the four IBA's and Spanish Lagoon, would help to safeguard the appropriate habitats and species that represent Aruba's rich biodiversity.

In addition to the visiting bird species that come to breed on the island, and the many species that spend part of their non-breeding season on the island, or pass through, Aruba has its own unique species. The Burrowing Owl, or 'Shoco', has quite rightly been proclaimed a national symbol as this sub-species is only found on Aruba. Similarly, the Brown-throated Parakeet or 'Prikichi' is a sub-species that is only found on Aruba.

Unfortunately, studies of birds conducted over the last fifteen years have indicated that several other native species are declining. Those species decreasing in number or locally extinct (extirpated) include, the Crested Bobwhite (Patrishi), the Yellow Oriole (Gonzalito), Caribbean Elaenia (Elenia caribe o), White-tailed Nightjar (Tapa camina), Groove-billed Ani (Chuchubi preto), White-tailed Hawk, (Partawela – probably extirpated), Scaly-naped Pigeon (Paloma azul – probably extirpated), and Common Ground Dove (Totolica). We have also observed several new nesting species, such as the Collared Plover, and the Southern Lapwing. Those bird species that are increasing tend to be those that are associated with human development or gardens, such as Bananaquit, House Sparrow, Blue-tailed Emerald, Rock Pigeon, Shiny Cowbird, and Carib Grackle.

But why we should see these changes in bird populations? Some of the increase is due to natural immigration, and in some cases 'new' species are out-competing the native species. The decline of native species may be due to a broad range of issues, but amongst these, habitat loss or fragmentation, and the introduction of non-native predators such as cats, rats, and boars are significant contributory factors.

Being aware of these bird population changes is important. It is equally important that key sites and habitats are conserved and their protection enforced. This book is a major contribution to this issue, as it is more likely for people to protect their wildlife, if they know it, and can enjoy its presence. Consequently, this lavishly illustrated book is an important component in helping to inform people of the island's bird heritage. It is often said, that every picture tells a story. This book tells a story of bird biodiversity on Aruba, and provides an introduction to a broader environmental education and enjoyment. Hopefully the pleasure gained from this book, will translate into an increased awareness and conservation of Aruba's birds.

Title page

Brown throated Parakeet

Dedication page

Black Skimmer

Page 8

Burrowing Owl

Right

Ruby Topaz Hummingbird





Introduction

Birds are fascinating creatures. They are descendants of dinosaurs and connect us to the far gone past. Like bees and bats, birds play a significant role in nature's evolutionary clockwork. They pollinate flowers and spread seeds. They help keep insect populations in balance. The state of affairs of our birds is an indicator for the state of affairs of nature as a whole and so they also connect us to our future.

Archeological findings of bird like remains date back some 150 million years and evidence demonstrates that the bird wildlife of Aruba predates any human's first steps on the island. Natural phosphate was found in the nineteenth century which originated from sea bird droppings. Over half a million tons of phosphate were exploited. Such commercial quantities can only come about in areas where large numbers of birds congregated over many years. Terns and gulls have been using Aruba as a nesting site for thousands of years.

The variety of our bird species is fascinating. Some endure our times of drought; while others have difficulty doing without our waterholes. The nest of our Shoco is in the ground while the Prikichi breeds in termite nests in trees. Our Brown Pelican has a wingspan of up to 2 meters, while our Blue-tailed Emerald has a body length of only 8 centimeters. We have simple colored birds and we have our Dornasol, our Ruby-topaz Hummingbird; a true magician of ever-changing sparkling colors. Aruba's terns breed by the thousands, close to one another while our female Blue-tailed Emerald takes care of her chicks alone, in a nest she has hidden from anyone's sight. Our Patrishi or Crested Bobwhite walks around slowly while feeding and our Peregrine Falcon hunts at phenomenal speeds. Some of our birds are carnivores, others are vegetarians. Some hunt in our skies, some in our trees and some even under water. Some are quiet; others are true musicians. And

so we can go on. It is this variety that makes our island's bird wildlife so fascinating. *Just: ... Imagine Aruba!*

Imagine Aruba!

There is so much beauty in Aruba yet to be discovered. Nature is like a masterpiece in everlasting development. So many believe they know our little paradise, yet they are surprised again and again at the beauty Aruba has to offer; so many look but haven't yet learned to see.

Initially, many reactions to the bird wildlife pictures we shared with others were received with skepticism. Some thought it was a joke and a hoax. Some even went so far as to call us liars. *"Impossible!! These pictures were absolutely not taken in Aruba!"*

At first we didn't know what to do with these reactions. But what they taught us was that so many, never in their wildest dreams, could ever imagine that such beauty could exist right here in our little paradise Aruba. This is the reason why we have given our entire collection of nature photography the collective name: *Imagine Aruba!* Our little Aruba is a paradise.

Threats

Tourism induced population growth

The development of tourism has brought about a lot of good for the country of Aruba. However, unbridled growth of the tourism sector is having a major impact on Aruba's nature resources. Within 25 years after Aruba's Status Aparte, our population has seen an increase from 60.000 to 100.000; a population growth of 60%.

The number of people, population and tourists, at any given time in Aruba adds up to a density of over 600 people per square kilometer,



Northern Parula



Neotropical Cormorant

Preceding pages
Black-bellied Whistling Duck

which makes Aruba one of the most densely populated countries in the world.

On a population of just over 100.000 people, we have more than 70.000 cars on the island, which is causing vast pressure to further increase our infrastructure.

Numbers from our Central Bureau of Statistics demonstrate that during the past fifteen years that of every 100 jobs created in the tourism sector, only 7 are filled by locals. The numbers also indicate that with every imported laborer on average 3 co-dependents will come to live in Aruba. A simple calculation demonstrates that for every 100 jobs created in this sector that 372 people will have to migrate to our island. As an illustration, constructing a new hotel of 500 rooms with a labor factor of 1.5 persons per room entails 750 new jobs, of which 698 will have to be filled by migrant labor. Adding the co-dependent factor to the equation means that such a new hotel will bring about a population increase of 2.792 persons.

Our ever expanding tourism sector has become the driving force of the island's habitat loss and fragmentation. May it be new large hotels, expansion of existing hotels or the new fashion of going for boutique hotels, they will all contribute significantly to further habitat loss and fragmentation. After all, it is needless to say that the required migrant laborers to fill these tourism sector jobs with their co-dependents will not be living on the hotel's premises.

Finding a healthy balance between developing tourism and preserving nature is the key to sustainability. If not, Aruba is at risk of becoming just another Torremolinos, an unattractive synthetic destination with just too many hotels, too many restaurants, too many shopping malls and too many people. We believe that improving the existing hotel infrastructure and the quality of service should be the main objective, while building new hotels and condominiums should be halted. The concept of a hotel moratorium has repeatedly been brought forward by subsequent governments. However, the courage needed to instate

a moratorium is still forth coming, although it is widely accepted that without such Aruba will never achieve sustainable development.

Aruba is in dire need of a more sustainable solution to drive our economy. The government of Aruba is working diligently on developing a new economic pillar for our island and is working hard on its 'going green' policy. These are crucial steps in the right direction for a more sustainable development for Aruba and we strongly encourage the government to proceed in the direction of such new strategies; the more so, since nature conservation is a fundamental aspect of moving towards a more green direction.

The invasive Boa constrictor, cats and rats

One particular photograph struck home. It was a shot of the invasive Boa constrictor consuming one of our birds. This picture made headlines across the media and was the talk of the day for weeks. As the saying goes, one picture can speak a thousand words.

Regretfully, Boa constrictors kept as pets were set free. The first sightings of boas in Aruba's wildlife date back to 1999. The boas adapted perfectly to their new environment and within a few years sightings of them were island wide.

In 2010, Aruba Birdlife Conservation teamed up with National Park Arikok and took the initiative to bring about a national awareness campaign about the devastating consequences of the Boa constrictor. Numbers of certain species of birds and of our cottontail (more related to a hare than a rabbit) for instance, started to dwindle. Although this initiative led to a successful national campaign and many Boa hunts, much remains to be done to get the Boa situation somewhat under control.

Other invasive species that are having an impact on our birds are cats and rats. International studies about the impact of cats on bird wildlife have brought about some staggering numbers. It is estimated that worldwide, cats kill more than one billion birds a year.



Legislation and protection

Regretfully, to date, bird wildlife is not protected in Aruba. A legal nature protection framework came about in 1995 (“*Natuurbeschermings-verordening*”). This legal framework can be seen as a general framework, an umbrella, to which lists of species have to be added to get protected. A list of birds remains to be finalized and made part of the legislation. Aruba Birdlife Conservation is aware that the



< Boa constructur on a cactus

Headline picture of a boa constrictor
consuming one of our birds

new Department of Nature and Environment is diligently working on producing such lists and we strongly encourage them to finalize them. Invasive species laws and regulations are also in need of a serious overhaul. Without such, it is just a matter of time before we will experience undesired consequences of yet another invasive species.

Aruba Birdlife Conservation

From hobby, to passion, to purpose

What started out as a hobby at the turn of the millennium, grew into a passion. Passion led to purpose. To date, Aruba’s bird wildlife is not protected. One of the main purposes of Aruba Birdlife Conservation is to preserve Aruba’s bird wildlife for future generations, including many micro habitats which our local and migratory birds need to survive. The roadmap to this destination is paved with awareness, education, lobby work, projects, and so forth. One such project is this book.

**From e-mails to calendars, from YouTube to Facebook,
from website to book**

Many thousands of hours have been volunteered to be able to bring everything together. The first bird pictures were taken just over fifteen years ago. Initially, we shared these pictures with friends by e-mail, who in turn shared them with theirs. The number of e-mail recipients grew to over five hundred among which an increasing number of non-residents. In 2009 a first Aruba Birdlife Conservation calendar was launched. Thousands of these calendars could be found in households and offices around the island and many abroad. We made a few short films of our birds and placed these on YouTube. Over time, Facebook replaced the e-mail distribution system and the number of followers has been increasing ever since. A website was developed for reference purposes and after this book has been published, our website will undergo a major overhaul. We also hope to make an extensive film of Aruba's bird wildlife one day. A lot remains to be done.

Conservation efforts

Awareness and nature photography

Our bird pictures have been instrumental to boosting national awareness of the beauty that Aruba has to offer, not only its natural beauty in general but more specifically the beauty of the birds that can be found on our island. Awareness is growing; from school children having new material to make their required presentations and school teachers introducing such material into their awareness education programs. Many locals have started enjoying their own gardens in a new way. A new generation of nature photographers has come about presenting their pictures on Facebook to the wider public and through such they too are contributing in a significant way to nature awareness. The momentum for nature conservation is culminating as never before.

Shoco, bird count and illegal dumpsites

Aruba Birdlife Conservation works in a broad scale of areas and

supports other NGO's, and certain government initiatives as well. The ultimate objective remains nature conservation. The following are a few initiatives that illustrate our field of play.

On February 4th, 2011, Aruba Birdlife Conservation initiated a campaign to rescue Aruba's Burrowing Owl, or Shoco, an endemic subspecies from going extinct. The objective was to get the Shoco nominated as national bird of Aruba. To our great satisfaction, the Minister of Culture of Aruba, Mrs. Michelle Hooijboer-Winklaar, took matters one step further and in January 2012 declared the Shoco one of Aruba's national symbols.

In 2011, Aruba Birdlife Conservation took the initiative to organize Aruba's first national bird count which was held throughout households around the island.

In December 2011, Aruba Birdlife Conservation initiated a campaign to bring a halt to illegal dumpsites popping up all around the island. After six months of campaigning, the government stepped in which lead to the shutting down and sanctioning of such illegal practices.

Parliament's motion to add 16 areas to Parke Nacional Arikok

In 2012, Aruba Birdlife Conservation submitted a petition to the Parliament of Aruba – at the request of all fractions represented in parliament – to give the following areas a special status of protection through declaring them to be part of Aruba's Arikok National Park.

The areas brought forward in the petition are: the California Dunes, Salinja Tierra del Sol (IBA), Salinja Malmok, Salinja Palmbeach, Bubaliplas (IBA), Sero Teishi, Spaans Lagoen (Ramsar Wetland Area), Mangel Halto, Rooi Bringamosa, Rooi Taki, Rooi Manoonchi, Reef Islands Oranjestad (IBA), all magrove areas, Rooi Lamunchi, Salinja Sabaneta, Reef Islands San Nicolas (IBA) and a strip of land alongside the coast of Seroe Colorado.

The four internationally recognized Important Bird Areas (IBA) and our Ramsar Wetland Area are among these areas to be declared as parts of our national park.



Burrowing Owl



Tri-colored Heron

On February 6th, 2013, a motion, “*motie no. 5 OV # 38 6-2-2013 AVP*”, was brought forward in parliament to protect these areas and to place them under supervision of our national park. The motion was carried in a unanimous fashion by all 21 members of parliament.

Three years have passed since the unanimous support by the parliament of Aruba to declare these areas part protected. We remain positive that one day soon the government will honor our parliament's wishes and that these significant habitats will become part of our national park.

Marine Park

Aruba Birdlife Conservation has also been lobbying for the establishment of a national marine park. Compared to the sister islands within The Kingdom of the Netherlands, Aruba has lagged behind in this area.

News has come to us that the government of Aruba is working diligently on establishing a marine park. For purposes of a singular and clear nature conservation policy as well as control of overhead costs it is important that the marine park too be placed under the supervision of Aruba's National Park.

Intentions and framework of this book

This book consists of three parts. An introduction, photographs of birds taken in Aruba and a checklist. The intentions of the book vary from promoting popular awareness, assisting in education to presenting some basic science in the form of an analysis of existing checklists and a recompilation of these and other available information into a new checklist of the birds of Aruba.

Popular awareness

To date, almost all books published containing information about birds of Aruba have been in a multi-country format. In the most concise formats, findings and information are aggregated into bird books

pertaining to the ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao) and in more comprehensive works North-eastern Latin-American countries and the Caribbean play a main role. From a purely international scientific ornithological perspective, this makes much sense. However, from a local popular and education nature awareness perspective this may have caused more harm than it has done good. The ‘logic’ is a simple and straight forward one: ‘those are not our birds’.

Our grass roots approach to counter this unforeseen and unintended scientific challenge has lead us to depart from the conventional multi-country format and to present the birds of Aruba ... as birds of Aruba. Eight years of bird calendars and ongoing postings of bird pictures on Facebook have taught us that this is the way to go to enhance popular awareness of the bird wildlife of Aruba: ‘These are our birds. We should protect them’.

Education

Many school teachers have been sending signals to Aruba Birdlife Conservation that they have a need for clear cut, straightforward, basic information on the birds of Aruba, including the local names of our birds. The combination of the bird photographs and the checklist in five languages is intended to lend a helping hand, not only to teachers but also to birders, bird photographers, and especially to the beginners among them.

252 species of birds, an updated bird checklist for Aruba

Information and checklists, if present, of species of birds presented in existing literature are as mentioned before, very often in a multi-country format, such as: “*Birds of Northern South America*”, “*Birds of the West Indies*”, “*Birds of The Netherlands Antilles*” and “*Birds of Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire*”.

Lots of effort has to be made to try and get a grip on the specific publication's list of the species of birds mentioned for Aruba. And then there are the subsequent challenges pertaining to getting a grip on the



American Kestrel



Yellow Warbler



Common Gallinule

status of the species for Aruba, their local names, and so on, and so forth.

In this first publication of a checklist by Aruba Birdlife Conservation of species of birds of Aruba, an effort is made to help those interested in the bird wildlife of Aruba by bringing existing information into one table.

Annette H. Peterson



Names of the species

Next to their scientific names, the names of the species of birds of Aruba are presented in four languages: English, Papiamentu, Dutch and Spanish. The foundation work used for the names in English, Papiamentu and Dutch is the checklist from '*Birds of Aruba, Curacao and Bonaire*' (2012), by Bart de Boer, Eric Newton and Robin Restall; a marvelous piece of work that brings so much together; a must have for any bird lover throughout the ABC islands!

Some minor grammatical changes were made to some of the Papiamentu names for birds of Aruba and for the species where no Papiamentu names were available, they were invented and added to them. A total of 18 new Papiamentu bird names are introduced. The names in Spanish are from those used in Avibase.

Contributors to this book

We invited Dr. Adrian Delnevo, an ornithologist and scientist, to write the foreword of this book. He has also been so kind to give us some pointers throughout the texts in this book. We thank him for having guided us throughout the years.

The photographs in this book have been taken by Albert A. Peterson and Gregory M. Peterson. We were born and raised in San Nicolas, Aruba.

Annette H. Peterson-Bredie, born and raised in the Netherlands and living in Aruba for over 25 years, has been advising, correcting and editing texts for Aruba Birdlife Conservation years before its official coming about. We thank her for her patience and dedication to make

sense of the texts that were written for this book and her many pieces of advice.

The composition of this book as well as the texts are by Gregory 'Greg' M. Peterson.

In the worlds of ornithology and bird photography, we are mere amateurs. We have had no formal training in bird wildlife nor in photography. We are autodidacts and to date, trial and error have been our companions.

We have three strengths, the most significant of which is our capacity to be patient. Being able to laugh joyfully at our endless mistakes comes in at a strong second place.

Our third most valuable asset is our 'delete button' which we have used a few million times during the past fifteen years.

There are two things, above all others, that we hope to achieve with this book. The first is to help demonstrate how beautiful Aruba's bird wildlife truly is; creating awareness. The second is reaching out a helping hand in the dire need for nature conservation in Aruba. We borrow this island from future generations and it is our duty to pass on to them some of the original beauty of Aruba's nature. The level of development of a country may never be measured by its concrete buildings and infrastructure, but rather by how much of its nature it dares to preserve.

Aruba and its important bird wildlife areas

Aruba is a Caribbean island country and is one of the four constituent countries that form the Kingdom of the Netherlands, along with the Netherlands, Curaçao and Sint Maarten. It is located in the southern Caribbean Sea, just 29 kilometers off the northern coast of Venezuela's Paraguaná peninsula and is situated between 12°19'N 70°1'W and 12°31'N 70°01'W.

Aruba has a tropical semi-arid climate with a mean monthly temperature which is moderated by constant trade winds that vary

Albert A. Peterson



Gregory M. Peterson



between 26.7 °C and 29.2 °C, with a yearly precipitation that rarely exceeds 470 millimeters. Aruba is located outside the Caribbean's Hurricane Alley and rarely experiences related weather threats. The island is approximately 178 km², and measures 30 kilometers long from its northwestern to its southeastern end and 10 kilometers across at its widest point. Aruba's territorial waters measure 6 nautical miles in the direction of Venezuela and 12 nautical miles in all other directions. Its Exclusive Economic Zone is 25,000 km² and has a reach of 200 nautical miles.

Aruba is relatively flat with some rolling hills at the central northern region of the island with Mount Jamanota's highest peak at 188 meters. Lava and limestone rock formations can be found at different locations. The flora consists of areas of xeric scrublands, with a variety of cacti, thorny shrubs and evergreens. Mangrove areas can be found at southern areas. The island has no rivers, but rather dry riverbeds and salinas or brackish waterpools.

The dry season is hard on flora and fauna but the island undergoes a true metamorphosis once the rainy season sets in. Within days after the first rains, the colors of the landscape change from a red-brown amalgamation to a variety of shades of green. The rainy season coincides with the northern winter months and Aruba's nature prepares for the arrival of many migratory birds from North America and some from as far as Alaska. **However**, due to its unique geographical location, Aruba also receives migrants from Central and South America as well as from other Caribbean islands.

But that which makes Aruba truly unique in the world has to do with our seabirds. Thousands of terns visit our island every year to produce offspring. Ten species of terns and one species of gull breed on five tiny reef islets located in the San Nicolas Bay area.

Arikok National Park

Parke Nacional Arikok is the only officially protected nature area of Aruba. It was established in 2000 and is a 3,400 hectares (34 km²)

terrestrial area, approximately 18% of the island's total land area. For visitors to Aruba, a tour to the park should be at the top of their bucket list!

This is Aruba's pride and glory when it comes to geology, gorgeous landscapes with caves, bocas, dunes and flora. It bids solace to Aruba's endemic rattlesnake and other reptiles. Different species of sea turtles use the park's shore to lay their eggs. However, on Aruba's drier northeastern shores only the sturdiest of Aruba's bird wildlife can survive. Most of Aruba's avifauna is found at the more southern areas of the island. Hence the desire to add the 16 mentioned areas to our national park.

Internationally recognized bird wildlife areas

Aruba has, besides Arikok National Park, five internationally recognized nature areas. Four of them are Important Bird Areas and one is a Ramsar wetland area.

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) are internationally recognized as being globally important habitats for the conservation of bird populations. IBAs are identified by BirdLife International. Aruba's four IBAs are recognized by the Birdlife International protocol of important bird areas in the Caribbean. In many countries IBAs are protected under national legislation. This is not yet the case on Aruba.

Ramsar wetland areas are areas that are, among others, recognized for their fundamental ecological functions as wetlands. Ramsar is a city in Iran where the convention was signed (1971) to protect such important nature areas. Hence the name Ramsar Convention.

Spanish Lagoon (Ramsar)

Spanish Lagoon is one of the island's most significant lagoons and was designated a Ramsar site in 1980 (Ramsar site no. 198). It borders with the most southern part of Parke Nacional Arikok. Two dry riverbeds, Rooi Taki and Rooi Bringamosa, connect these two very important nature areas. Spaans Lagoen, as it is called in Dutch, is approximately



Black-bellied Whistling Duck



Willet



Bare-eyed Pigeon



Short-billed Dowitcher



Crested Bobwhite

70 hectares in size and is one of the largest natural lagoons in the Caribbean. The two-kilometer-long lagoon penetrates the landscape varying in width from two to five hundred meters and is bordered by lush mangroves and mudflats. Four micro-habitats come together in this area when we include the surrounding plateaus. Although it was primarily recognized as a Ramsar site due to its significance as a feeding and breeding area for waterbirds and as a nursery area for a variety of fish species and crustaceans, many other species of birds can be observed at this location year round.

Tierra del Sol Salina (IBA)

The Tierra del Sol Salina (IBA AW002) is one of Aruba's four Important Bird Areas. It is situated at the north-western end of the island at the property of the Tierra del Sol Resort, Spa and Country Club. It is surrounded by a desert scrub habitat and has a natural connecting flow line to the sea where excessive rain water can flow over to the ocean. During rough weather, sea water also flows in the direction of this salina. This salina can dry out during an extended dry season. As many as 170 species of birds have been observed in this important bird area.

Bubali Wetlands (IBA)

The Bubali Wetlands (IBA AW001) is another Important Bird Area. A waste water treatment facility was built at this salina which has actually split this wetland into two areas. Water from the plant flows into a part located between The Mill Resort and Suites and La Cabana Beach and Racquet Club. Reeds were added to this part of the sanctuary giving it a distinct appearance. The second part of this salina extends westward from behind The Mill Resort up to the highway intersection and has a more local nature appearance. Many migratory species are observed at this wetland area, especially during the northern winter months.

Oranjestad Reef Islands (IBA)

Oranjestad Reef Islands (IBA AW003) are located to the south of Aruba's capital and consist of several coral and sand islets. The mangroves on the islets just in front of the harbor have been seriously damaged due to human conduct. A barbeque was held there which led to a fire that destroyed most of the vegetation. Later, rough seas due to a hurricane in the region washed away most of the remaining damaged mangroves. The Aruba Ports Authority has initiated a mangrove reforestation program on several of these islets with a success rate of over 90% of the planted trees. We look forward to a very positive outcome of this fantastic initiative. It only goes to show how very vulnerable our nature habitats are.

San Nicolas Bay Reef Islands (IBA)

The San Nicolas Bay Reef Islands (IBA AW004) consist of five reef islets located at the north-eastern side of the island, south-west of Rodgers Beach. The seabird migration to these islets is what makes this yearly event from March to July unique in the world. Ten species of terns and one species of gull breed in very close proximity to one another. Upwards of 15,000 birds nest in this very important bird wildlife area.

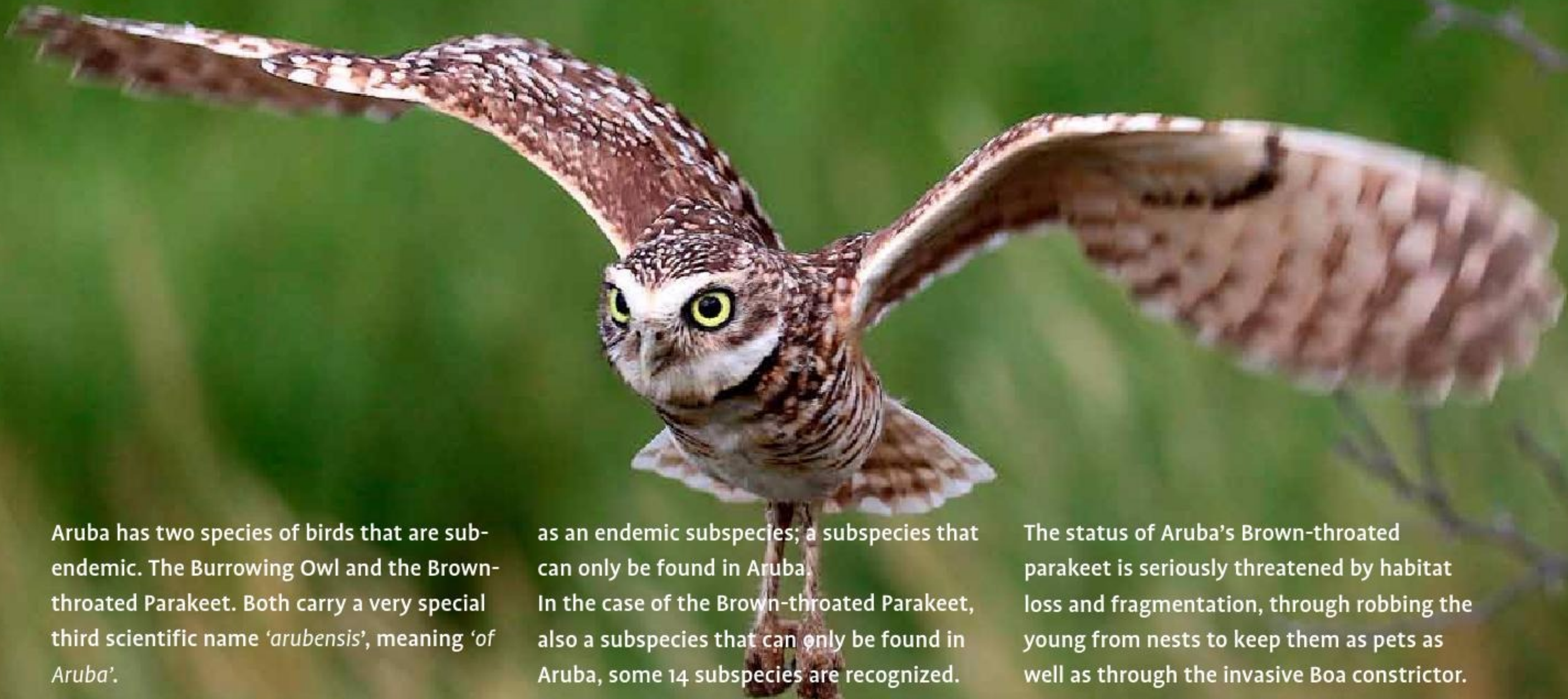
A call to protect sixteen areas

As described under conservation efforts, Parliament of Aruba unanimously approved that sixteen areas be given a special status of protection by declaring them part of Arikok National Park, among which the just described important bird areas (IBAs) and the Ramsar wetland Spanish Lagoon. We make a plea to the government of Aruba to carry this through. In doing so, they will make a very valuable contribution to the survival chances of Aruba's bird wildlife.

Bird Wildlife of Aruba



ARUBA'S ENDEMIC SUBSPECIES • *Arubensis*



Aruba has two species of birds that are sub-endemic. The Burrowing Owl and the Brown-throated Parakeet. Both carry a very special third scientific name '*arubensis*', meaning 'of Aruba'.

The term 'endemic' in the context of these two bird species can best be interpreted as having become native to Aruba. Due to their isolation from congeners throughout the region, over time, they developed one or more unique traits through which they can be distinguished from their congeners. The Burrowing Owl is a new world owl. In other words, they can only be found on the American continent. At present, some 22 'varieties' of Burrowing Owls are recognized, also known as subspecies, hence the fact that Aruba's Burrowing Owl can be described

as an endemic subspecies; a subspecies that can only be found in Aruba.

In the case of the Brown-throated Parakeet, also a subspecies that can only be found in Aruba, some 14 subspecies are recognized. The Burrowing Owl feeds during the day, mostly early morning and late afternoon, mainly on lizards, insects, and small mammals. They nest in burrows, with family groups nesting near-by; semi-colonial. The status of Aruba's Burrowing Owl is threatened by habitat loss and fragmentation.

The Brown-throated parakeet feeds mainly on fruit and seeds and can first be heard, then seen moving from one feeding location to another. They mostly make their nests in large termites' nests.

The status of Aruba's Brown-throated parakeet is seriously threatened by habitat loss and fragmentation, through robbing the young from nests to keep them as pets as well as through the invasive Boa constrictor. Whereas many flocks of sometimes up to thirty birds or more once decorated Aruba's landscapes, nowadays the number of flocks and the numbers per flock have decreased dramatically.

The Burrowing Owl has been declared a national symbol of Aruba in 2012. Efforts are now being made to get the Brown-throated Parakeet declared as the national bird of Aruba. Giving these sub-endemic bird species such recognition helps their chances of survival.



Burrowing Owl

It is estimated that there are only about 200 pairs of the Aruba Burrowing Owl left. Aruba is the only place in the Kingdom of the Netherlands where they can be found.









Brown-throated Parakeet

They are first heard and then seen flying in small flocks.

Their numbers are dwindling very fast and special attention is required to prevent them from going extinct in Aruba.





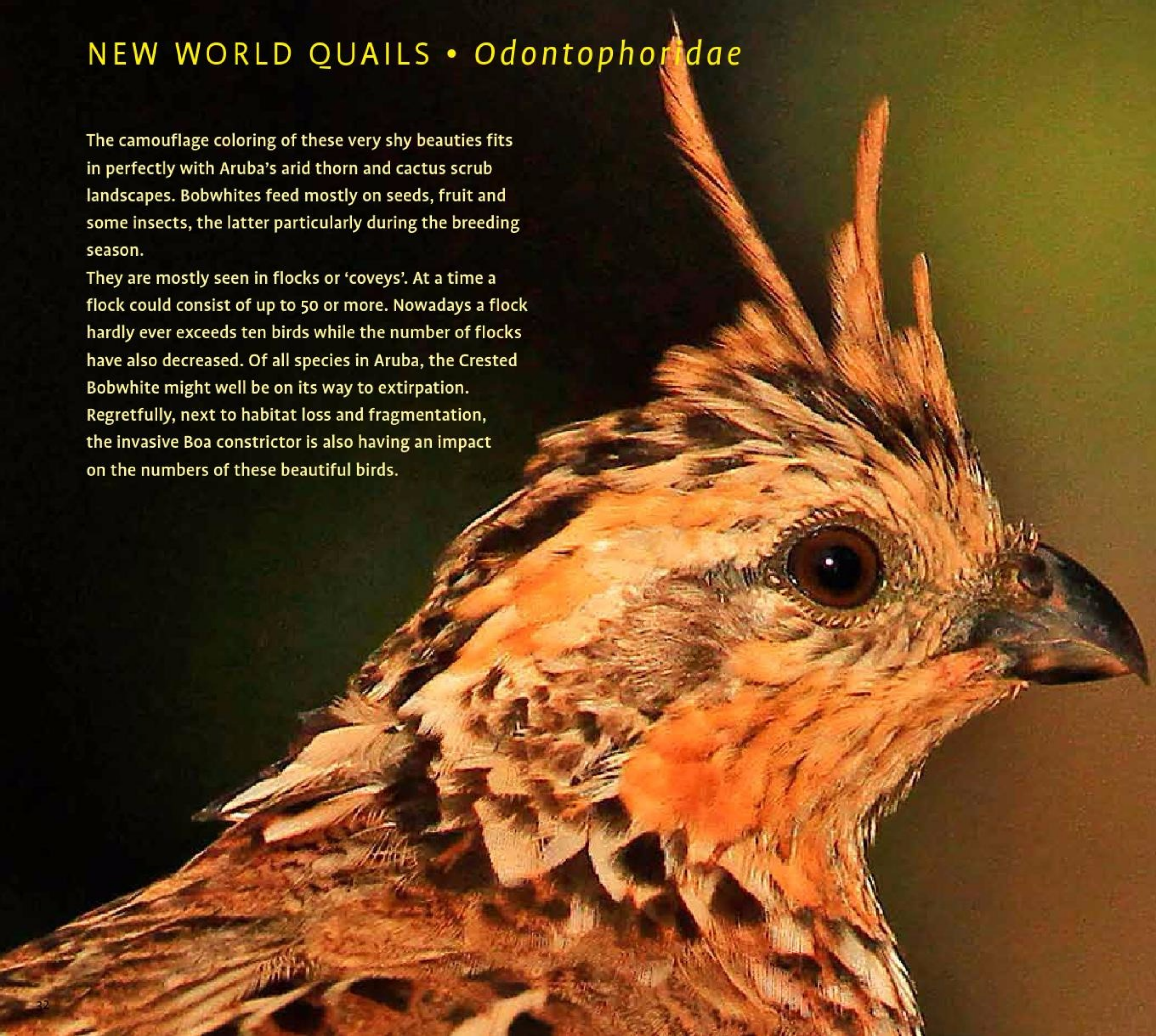




NEW WORLD QUAILS • *Odontophoridae*

The camouflage coloring of these very shy beauties fits in perfectly with Aruba's arid thorn and cactus scrub landscapes. Bobwhites feed mostly on seeds, fruit and some insects, the latter particularly during the breeding season.

They are mostly seen in flocks or 'coveys'. At a time a flock could consist of up to 50 or more. Nowadays a flock hardly ever exceeds ten birds while the number of flocks have also decreased. Of all species in Aruba, the Crested Bobwhite might well be on its way to extirpation. Regretfully, next to habitat loss and fragmentation, the invasive Boa constrictor is also having an impact on the numbers of these beautiful birds.



Crested Bobwhite

These very shy birds can best be observed during the cool early morning hours. They walk more than they fly.

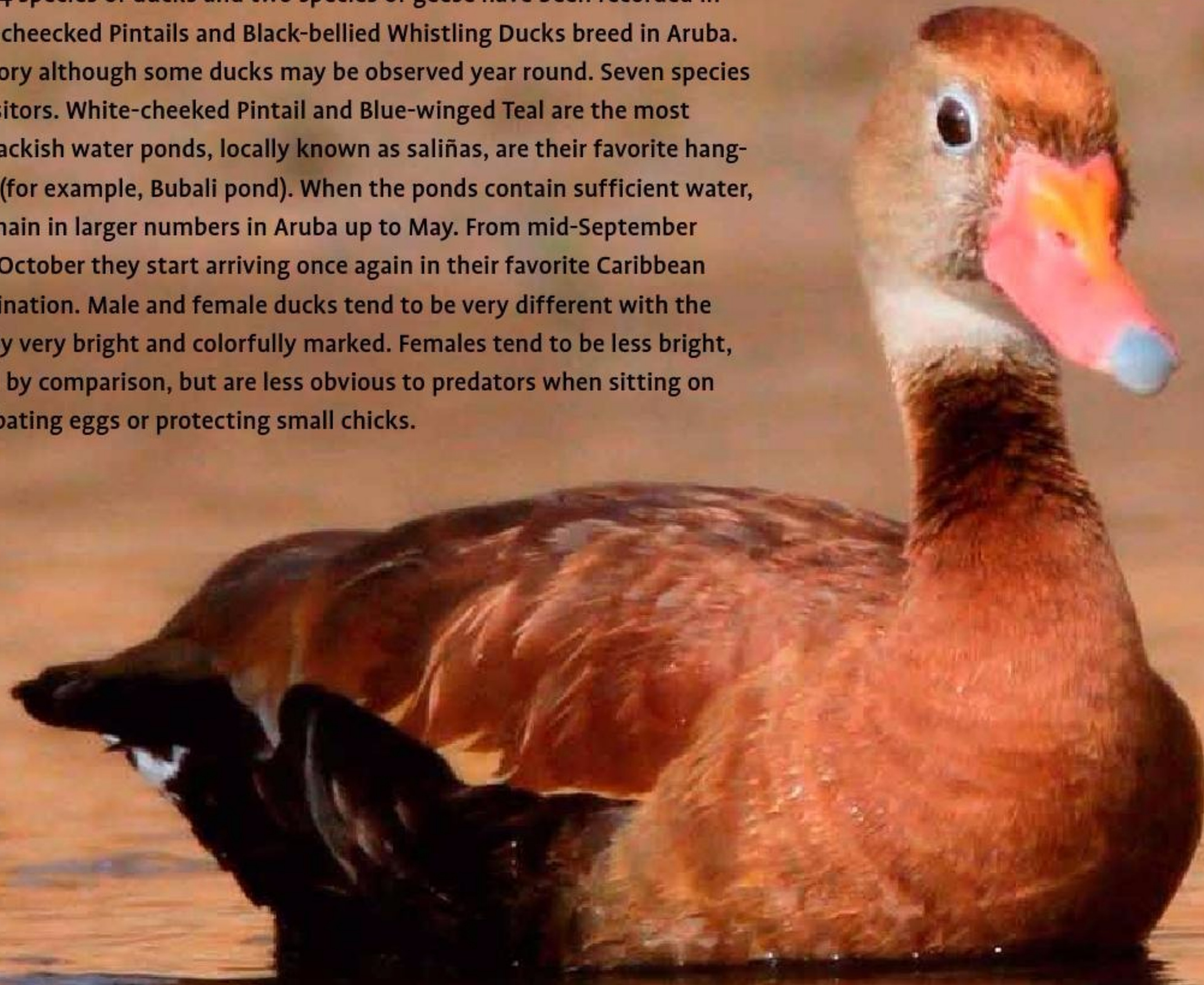






DUCKS & GEESE • *Anatidae*

No less than 14 species of ducks and two species of geese have been recorded in Aruba. White-cheeked Pintails and Black-bellied Whistling Ducks breed in Aruba. All are migratory although some ducks may be observed year round. Seven species are regular visitors. White-cheeked Pintail and Blue-winged Teal are the most numerous. Brackish water ponds, locally known as salinas, are their favorite hang-out locations (for example, Bubali pond). When the ponds contain sufficient water, ducks will remain in larger numbers in Aruba up to May. From mid-September to the end of October they start arriving once again in their favorite Caribbean vacation destination. Male and female ducks tend to be very different with the males typically very bright and colorfully marked. Females tend to be less bright, and quite dull by comparison, but are less obvious to predators when sitting on the nest incubating eggs or protecting small chicks.



Black-bellied Whisling Duck

This long-legged duck with a bright pink bill, can be very noisy. While ducks normally quack, these whistle! This bird is a resident breeding species on Aruba but is also joined by several migrants from other locations between October and March.





Comb Duck

The male has a large black knob on its bill. Only observed once and pictures taken within 30 seconds before they fled the scene.

